



# Town of Groton, Connecticut

## Meeting Minutes

### Town Council Committee of the Whole

45 Fort Hill Road  
Groton, CT 06340-4394  
Town Clerk (860)441-6640  
Town Manager  
(860)441-6630

**Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Peter J. Bartinik, Jr., Natalie Burfoot Billing, Heather Sherman Bond, Catherine Kolnaski, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Paulann H. Sheets, Thomas J. Skrmetti, and Elissa T. Wright.**

**Tuesday, November 16, 2004**

**6:00 PM**

**Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1**

#### **SPECIAL MEETING - JOINT MEETING WITH CITY COUNCIL**

#### **1. CALL TO ORDER**

*Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.*

#### **2. ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Billing, Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr. and Councilor Sheets  
Members Absent: Councilor Skrmetti and Councilor Wright

*Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent, Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnyan. City Mayor Dennis Popp, Deputy Mayor Paul Duarte, and City Councilors Sharon Schick, Marian Galbraith, and David Hale.*

#### **3. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

*- FYE 2006 Budget*

*Mayor Watson noted that the Town Council will be considering a resolution to direct the Town Manager to submit a level service budget, and suggest to the Board of Education an up to 3.2% increase. Outstanding City issues are the request for funding for a City planner and the highway repaving needs. The Town Manager sent a memo to Mayor Popp indicating that ranking the City roads along with the Town's road or adding them to the Capital Improvement Program request are acceptable alternatives. The Town is ultimately responsible for providing those types of funds to the City. The Town Manager distributed copies of the budget projection sheets that were prepared by Sal Pandolfo.*

*Councilor Wright arrived at 6:07 p.m.*

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Billing, Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Sheets and Councilor Wright  
Members Absent: Councilor Skrmetti

*Councilor Billing directed attention to the projected mill rate increase of 1.37 in FYE 2006. Mayor Popp stated that state revenues are a crapshoot so it is difficult to put together a budget. He provided a brief overview of the City's budget outlook, noting that there are no new programs on the horizon, other than the planner. The City Highway Department budget is already "bare bones", and the costs in the Police Department keep going up. Public safety and roads and streets are critical functions of a municipality. Mayor Popp stated he doesn't know what the City would do under a zero dollar budget. Contract increases are in the 3% range, offset by an increase in premium sharing through elimination of caps.*

*Councilor Galbraith stated she is relieved that the Council is looking at services, but she stated they can't deal in absolutes. She suggested that the Council also look at services that have been cut, for example bulky waste pick up.*

*Councilor Wright noted that she made a motion (that failed) to base the budget on level property tax revenues. Mayor Popp reminded everyone when the Town suffered a loss of MM&E funds very late in the budget process. Councilor Wright pointed out that by far the biggest tax bite is the*

property tax. Mayor Popp agreed that everyone would favor meaningful reform of the tax system. Councilor Sheets agreed with Councilor Galbraith that services should be looked at. She feels that the Town needs to meet its obligations to fund City road projects. Councilor Bartinik asked Mayor Popp about the Town contracting for bulky waste pickup services from the City now that the City is providing the service to its residents. Mayor Popp doesn't feel it would be possible to extend the service to the Town with the existing crew, but they could hire more people on a contractual basis. Mayor Popp does not feel that the bulky waste service can be measured on the basis of pay back; there are side benefits to the community. He noted that the system used in the City is different than what the Town had in place.

Deputy Mayor Duarte stated the City takes a very service-oriented approach to the way they operate, and finding ways to maintain those services is important. The City has no desire to decrease services at this time. Councilor Billing noted that maintaining services may require a tax increase, and that is the issue that divides the community. Mayor Popp suggested that the Town needs to balance the needs of one part of the community against another. Costs keep going up. All the City wants is to maintain services. They are not asking for anything extravagant. He added that the City also supports giving employees the raises and benefits they deserve.

Councilor O'Beirne noted that he too enjoyed the twice a year bulky waste pickups. He chose a level service budget as a starting point because it places the burden on department heads to cost out individual services. He challenged communities to put the pressure on the state right now to have a budget in place on time. Mayor Popp noted that SCCOG members were told at the Legislative Committee meeting not to expect any changes or property tax reform.

Councilor Bond asked if either Mayor has gone to Hartford and spoken to the Governor or spoken during a session, adding that we need more of a voice in Hartford. Mayor Popp stated that individual town leaders have spoken to the Appropriations Committee and received nothing. It is not easy fighting the representation numbers.

Mayor Popp asked the Council to also consider that the community is growing, and with that growth comes a demand for services. Businesses are moving to the community because it is growing.

*- Highway Capital Improvement Program*

Mayor Popp stated he hasn't finalized the street repaving list yet. The City is working with Colin Kelly from the Town. It occurred to Mayor Popp that if the City includes its repaving projects in the Town's CIP, then they will be subject to RTM approval. Mayor Popp feels it would be better to put a line item in the City budget for approval rather than have it subject to two votes. Councilor Billing noted that the RTM has approved the City highway budget in past years.

Mayor Popp noted that the City has signed a contract for the study of Thames Street, which was previously authorized by the Town Council.

Councilor Billing noted that there was money in the City budget for road work in the past. Mayor Popp indicated the funds have not been eliminated. They are used to address major arteries in the City, with the exception of Thames Street.

*- Planning Services Provided to the City of Groton*

Deputy Mayor Duarte asked the Council if they have made a decision on the City's request to fund a full time planner. Town Manager Oefinger explained that she sent a letter to Mayor Popp asking if the request could wait until the budget session and also suggesting that the current arrangement be modified in the interim. No response was received.

Councilor O'Beirne asked why this has become such an issue, describing it as a "nickel and dime" issue for the City to pay for. He added that he can understand the City wanting to hire its own planner, and cited examples of positions where that has been done already. Mayor Popp stated the Town provides planning services for the City now. He is trying to get a more responsive and quicker resolution to planning and zoning issues in the City. It seems natural that if the Town is paying for 20 hours now, the Town should pay for additional hours. If the Town provides a planner, 20 hours a week is not enough. Mayor Watson noted that the Town Manager has indicated many times that he believes planning services should be provided to the City to the required levels. Councilor Bond asked if Mayor Popp would be satisfied with a Town planner dedicated to the City full time, and Mayor Popp stated he didn't know. Mayor Popp stated he would want some discretion. Councilor Galbraith suggested that "dedicated to the City" would have to be defined. If the planner has to return to the Town to do Town business, then that person is not "dedicated to the City." Mayor Popp noted that under the current planning arrangement, they are not able to adapt to changing conditions in the City.

Town Manager Oefinger noted there is a distinction between the number of hours of effort and who is running the show. The current agreement states that the planner's work program in the City is to be directed by the Mayor of City. Town Manager Oefinger emphasized that he has tried to get rid of the 20-hour limit for years. The City Mayor was given the prerogative to negotiate with the Manager as part of the original agreement.

The Town Manager went on to say that there are a lot of things that aren't getting done in the Town either. Just because someone has an idea doesn't mean that there is staff time to get it done. There has to be balance. Mayor Popp stated the Town may not want to get something done, but the City does. The question then becomes where does the Council want to direct that money.

Councilor Billing noted that no formal decision has been made by the Committee of the Whole. She supports increasing the hours, but wants to keep in mind that the same level of service should be available in the Town and City. Councilor Billing noted a draft agreement was developed in July and she asked why it hasn't moved forward. The Town Manager supports providing additional hours and a majority of the Town Council seems to support it. Councilor Billing noted that some Councilors have balked at providing funds to the City to hire its own planner. Mayor Popp stated the issue is one of time.

Councilor Sheets suggested it may be a problem if we don't send the same planner to the City and she can understand why the City would want continuity of services. She feels that the Town is also in the action mode, not the planning mode. Councilor Sheets commended the City of Groton Utilities on its stewardship of the reservoir and offered to help.

The Town Manager clarified that different planners would be assigned to the City depending on the project so that the person with the most expertise in the department is working on a particular project. A single planner would accomplish the day to day staffing in the City.

Deputy Mayor Duarte stated he is still looking for indication of what the Council is willing to do. Councilor Wright asked how important absolute control of this person is. Mayor Popp stated he needs to be able to assign tasks and follow up on them. Councilor O'Beirne suggested that the City be given an answer, noting that the Council has spent more time on this issue than on the Board of Education's budget last year. Councilor Billing stated she is not sure the Council has to take action since the Town Manager has indicated a willingness to remove the 20-hour restriction.

Other

Deputy Mayor Duarte requested upgrades to map making capabilities in the City. He stated that

*the City pays into certain Town departments including the IT department and gets zero return. He requested three ArcMap licenses and the same data maintenance capabilities that the Town has, as well as training for users. Mr. Duarte feels the Town should provide those services to the City. Councilor Bond asked if the Town system can be shared and Mr. Duarte stated it can with the same software, which is what he is requesting. Discussion followed. It was noted that there is access to the Town's GIS system through the internet, but data can't be analyzed or manipulated. The cost for the requested items is unknown. The Council suggested that Mr. Duarte direct his request to the Town Manager. Councilor O'Beirne expressed concern that this is another duplication of effort and requested additional information.*

*Councilor Wright questioned the statement about zero return from Town departments. Mr. Duarte stated that the City doesn't use the Personnel Department, but City taxes pay for it. Councilor Wright suggested that Mr. Duarte was viewing City taxes as a user fee, and she took issue with that premise.*

*The Town Manager distributed the budget calendar.*

#### **4. ADJOURNMENT**

*The meeting adjourned at 7:32 p.m.*